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**FRANCE: The Coming of Age: the World Cup of France '98**

**by Geoff Hare and Hugh Dauncey**

7000 WORD VERSION

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Football's sixteenth World Cup Finals will be held in France in 1998. The French organisers hope the Finals will reveal to an admiring international community the genius of French planning, architecture, transport, media and telecommunications, policing, and, of course, football. The strongly Presidential regime of the Fifth Republic (founded 1958) has traditionally used a range of sporting and other cultural manifestations as instruments of world politics, to compensate for France's relative lack of military or economic power. France is not commonly regarded as a major footballing nation, and yet football is clearly the most popular sport in France in terms of number of players at all levels and of paying spectators. French football administrators, following in the footsteps of the founding father of the Olympic movement, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, have been among the most influential visionaries of football as a world game. They helped move football beyond the national context, at a time when its English inventors, reticent about the internationalisation of the game, were turning their backs on Europe and the rest of the world.

While football's early development in France has much in common with the creation of a shared sense of place in emerging urban working class communities across western Europe, albeit on a smaller scale than in England, reflecting the smaller scale of the French industrial revolution, it differs in its organisational structures. Its regulatory system and its governing bodies and clubs have been shaped by the French state's concept of the public service, of Republican and democratic values, and of centralist interventionism, as opposed to laissez-faire individualism. (Miège 1993)

Professional football, still reliant on municipal subsidies, has become a key tool in local politics, used, sometimes corruptly, by ambitious local mayors to further their local and national political

careers. This aspect of the 'French exception' has come into conflict with European developments and France's national ambitions to create 'a strong France in an independent Europe', as French clubs, essentially non-profit-making organisations, operating within the context of high taxation and exceptionally high social costs falling on all French employers, have come to terms with the European Single Market and the commercial realities of competition law, as expressed in the Bosman ruling. (Miège 1996) The result has been, with the odd exception, an exodus of the whole of their 1996 international squad to English, Italian and Spanish clubs. The economic weakness of French clubs with low income from attendance (average Division 1 gates of 14,212 in the 1996-97 season) means they cannot compete in terms of wages compared to what the same players can earn in Manchester, Milan, Madrid or Munich (Rocheteau & Chaumier 1997: 555; *Clubs...* 1996: 30-31). Paris Saint Germain, with the highest attendances in the league, is the only French club to have signed a top foreign star (Marco Simone from Milan AC) in 1997-98, if one discounts Marseille's signing of Fabrizio Ravanelli from Middlesbrough. New sources of revenue from commercial sponsorship and from an already well developed subscription television and pay-per-view digital TV system may provide a life-line for the top dozen clubs, especially if interest in football increases after the World Cup Finals.

French fans, now imitating their Italian, more than their English counterparts in their local affiliations and rivalries, again on a reduced scale, whether one thinks in terms of 'football associated violence' or Kop culture, have had little to cheer about over the years (Broussard 1990). There is nonetheless a distinct national consciousness of key moments of national elation and disappointment, the latter, as for England, often occasioned by clashes with Germany. Shared myths and values, creating shared national identity around football (especially as television has taken over from the highly developed sporting press and radio as the main vector of sports coverage) can be evoked by the recall of symbolic places and dates : Sweden 1958, Seville 1982, Parc des Princes 1984, Furiani 1992. Iconic teams and individuals have emerged out of French participation in European and world football competitions: Reims, Saint-Etienne, Marseille; PSG; Kopa, Platini, Hidalgo, Tigana, and who knows, in 1998, perhaps Desailly and Zidane.

It is no coincidence that among the great French players figure members of the immigrant community, reflecting in their different epochs the varying origins of the successive immigrant communities: Polish, Italian, Iberian, Black African, North African. The issues of

multiculturalism and racism have found an expression within football, where it can be argued, despite the use of the terraces for self-publicity by small neo-nazi groups, tolerance and integration have been fostered through the idolisation by football fans of individual members of ethnic minority groups. (Beaud & Noiriel 1990: 93)

Finally, although it is easy to fall into the trap of national stereotypes, and while different managers of the national team have imposed different emphases, the French footballing public has proudly identified with the entertaining, attacking panache of Platini's teams, their 'champagne football', which, even if it has not always travelled well, is an approach to which the national team has consistently returned, as a more general expression of French national style.

## 2. FOOTBALL AND NATIONAL DIVISIONS

Football and other modern sports were imported into France in the late nineteenth century from England. Domestically French football has come a long way since 1872, when the first French football club was founded in Le Havre. Since 1894 and the first amateur 'national' championship between six Parisian clubs, the game has become a national sport, professionalised in 1931, but still retaining a massive following of nearly two million registered amateur players and 23,000 clubs, far ahead of any other sport including rugby, with which it is always compared.

### 2.1. Sport and national divisions: Catholic and secular football

Initially, before the First World War, football was played by a social elite in imitation of its amateur British roots with an estimated 2000 players in France by 1900 (Bourg 1986). The Channel ports and Paris were the first to feel the English influence, although it also spread to Mediterranean ports like Marseille and Sète. British workers played amongst themselves, then the French joined in. French students who had lived in Britain also imported the game, especially to Paris. The existence of a similar traditional game, 'la soule', in Brittany and Normandy helped the game spread in the west of France. During this period football had difficulty getting recognition, papers tending to favour other sports. The widely read sports paper *L'Auto* generally devoted its front page to rugby. This despite the fact that football had over twice as many registered teams as rugby. By 1911 about 2000 football clubs flourished. (Thomas *et al.* 1991: 108-112; Wahl 1990: 126-129).

The anglophile Henri Delaunay attended the Cup Final at Crystal Palace in 1902 and was inspired to set up something similar in France, partly for its own sake but also to unify the various Federations that had grown up and that were in competition with each other for running football in France. In its early history football was not immune from the major ideological split in French society, between the secularising republican Left and the Catholic traditionalist right. This parallel development each side of the ideological divide is sometimes still visible, as for example in market town of Auxerre, where alongside the D1 club A J Auxerroise is Le Stade Auxerrois, still in the regional leagues that its neighbour emerged from in the 1960s. Le Stade was founded as a secular sports club whereas A J was the Church sports club. Some older supporters of Le Stade still refuse to set foot in the D1 stadium across the way. (Sowden 1997: 10-11). Reflecting the ideological divide (lay versus Catholic) and also the different approach between single-sport clubs and the multi-sport clubs, four major Federations had grown up before the First World War: Union des Sociétés Françaises Sportives et Athlétiques (USFSA), Fédération Gymnastique et Sportive des Patronages de France (FGSPF), Ligue du Football Association (LFA) and Fédération Cycliste et Amateur de France (FCAF). (Thibert & Rethacker 1996: 34) Delaunay, a former player, became Secretary General of the FGSPF, founded by the Catholic Church, as a proselytising tool.

The French catholic clergy, seeing themselves deprived of influence over French youth by the secular educational reforms of the Republican governments of the 1880s, reacted by creating through local 'patronages de quartier' new places for young people's out-of-school or post-school activities, under a national co-ordinating body, the FGSPF. Influenced by its popularity with the Parisian middle classes, the Patronages chose to concentrate on soccer rather than rugby in promoting a team sport, and they helped spread the game to other parts of the country. (Augustin 1990: 101). Compulsory national service for young men, where football was a common recreation, with inter-regimental and inter-regional games, also played a part spreading the game. However, in the course of the interminable Dreyfus Affair at the turn of the century, attitudes to the role of the army, torn between the traditionalist ideology of its officer class and its Republican duties to the state, were sharply divided. A simple incident is illustrative of the effect on soccer of these various rifts cutting through society as a whole. A dispute between the Federations vying with each other over regulating and organising football led to the resignation from FIFA of the lay omnisports federation USFSA, which happened to be the only Federation recognised by the French Army. In February 1912, the French international team selected to meet Switzerland included a certain Triboulet, a left-winger, doing his national service in

Cholet. He asked for a 36 hour pass to enable him to play, and while the army gave him leave, they forbade him to play, since the French national team were not playing under the banner of the USFSA. Triboulet got the train to Saint-Ouen, with the firm idea of sitting in the stand to watch the game, but no replacement had been arranged, leaving France with only ten players. Under pressure from fellow players and spectators, he was persuaded to take the field, and turned out to be the star of the match. He scored the second goal and made two others in France's 4-1 victory ( a rare enough occurrence in those days). The next day a proud comrade sent a newspaper cutting to Triboulet's commanding officer, and the national hero found himself serving a week in an army gaol for disobeying orders. (Thibert & Rethacker 1991: 32-33)

In the face of these divisions, Delaunay was instrumental in founding an umbrella body (Comité Français Interfédéral - CFI) bringing together the Federations, but it took until the end of the First World War to organise a national knock-out Cup competition open to all clubs irrespective of their governing body. The success of the French Cup both increased football's popularity and its unity at the top, leading to the transformation of the CFI into a single French Football Federation in 1919, overcoming ideological divergences, internal politics, and personal rivalries. (Thibert & Rethacker 1991: 40) Whereas these social and ideological conflicts were to continue to structure political and social relations up to and beyond the Second World War, although gradually overshadowed by conflicts opposing capital and labour, the resolution of differences within the football governing bodies as early as 1919 is a tribute to the unifying power of the sport, which, after the First World War, was becoming the nation's mass sport with its own specialist press such as the magazine *Football* founded 1910, and *France Football* in 1923 (Wahl 1989: 352).

## **2.2. Multiculturalism and racism**

Just as the key socio-cultural conflict of post-revolutionary France from 1798 to 1945, the battle between catholic France and secular France, was reflected in the development of different football leagues, and indeed just as football's integrative force was stronger than this Franco-French quarrel in bringing the Federations and Leagues together, so football has reflected another major area of social conflict since the 1970s, the issues of multiculturalism and racism.

Current concerns about multiculturalism and traditional French values mean that the multi-ethnic composition of teams in the French league and national team is a focus of debate and has been target of criticism from the extreme right. Football has been and remains a special road to social

promotion in French society, taken by immigrants and children of immigrants such as Kopa(szewski) (Poland), Djorkaeff (Armenia), Platini (Italy), Fernandez and Hidalgo (Spain), and black players from Francophone Africa (Tigana, Desailly), the Maghreb (Zidane), French West Indies (Trésor, Lama), and New Caledonia (Karembeu). (Beaud and Noiriel 1990)

The national squad for the 1998 World Cup mirrors France in all its ethnic and social diversity, presenting a target for extreme-right wing criticisms of the commitment of certain players. During the 1996 European Championships held in England, a furore arose over comments made by the leader of the Front National, Jean-Marie Le Pen questioning whether the team could properly represent France, such was the concentration of players of immigrant origin whom he claimed were unable to sing the Marseillaise, either because they could not, or would not. The xenophobia of Le Pen was unanimously condemned by other political figures, partly in honest adherence to France's policies on the integration of first- and second-generation immigrants and partly in tune with the surge in patriotic feeling occasioned by the performances of the French team.

In January 1998, a further scandal broke out over the views allegedly expressed by Christian Karembeu, a French national team member having just signed for Real Madrid that he felt as much Kanak (indigenous New Caledonian) as French and was using his selection for the national team to gain publicity for the problems of his birthplace. In general, the origins of the national team players seem of little importance in France, except when controversy is created - usually by the extreme right - over particularly sensitive issues such as France's relations with New Caledonia.

French club football has occasionally been tainted by racist behaviour, especially in areas like the south east coast and parts of Marseille which have been a fertile breeding ground for National Front support. In 1989 when the FN was getting 15% of the vote in local elections in Marseille, racist taunts to visiting black players developed (Broussard 1990: 192), and although this was not organised by the FN, it was a reflection of underlying tensions in French society. In Paris also in the late 1980s, some elements of the skin-head following of PSG seemed to be using football as a recruiting ground for extreme-right-wing ideas, but overall, the fact that the much-admired Youri Djorkaeff is the son of a previous French national team captain of Armenian origin best reflects the generally good integration of players of immigrant origin into French football.

### 3. FOOTBALL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

France's formation as a modern nation state was a century too early for football to have been a tool for forging an initial shared national identity. This was achieved, in the face of major ideological conflict throughout the nineteenth century, through strengthening the *ancien régime's* already centralised administration, the imposition by Napoléon of a Civil Code, and the spread of the standard French language, replacing provincial dialects, a process completed by the innovation in the 1880s of a free, universal and secular primary school system promoting Republican values. The growing transport infrastructure following the building of a national rail network in the nineteenth century, followed by three military invasions (1870, 1914, 1940), helped unite the country behind nationalistic values.

National consciousness and identity is not however a once and for all acquisition within a society. Writers such as Philip Schlesinger (1991), Stuart Hall (1992), Chris Barker (1997) and others have argued, after Anderson (1983: 15-16) that the nation is an 'imagined community', that national cultural identity is constructed and reproduced by narratives of the nation by which stories, images, symbols and rituals represent shared meanings of nationhood, that collective identity is always provisional and has to be continually reinforced, that it is via the newspapers and radio and television news especially that people are encouraged to imagine such events occurring simultaneously, and that national culture must be linked to shared consciousness of events that matter. Anthony Giddens (1985) has argued that for most people, most of the time, national identity is not at the forefront of their minds. Identity and meaningful experience are much more likely to arise in the realms of the private spheres of family, friends, and sexual relationships, and one might add in the work place. It is probably true that the routine of daily life is only occasionally interrupted by shared consciousness of events of national importance (Giddens 1985), but the key collective rituals that impinge on national cultural identity are important political events, such as Presidential elections, serious disasters, national commemorations, state funerals . . . or major sporting events.

#### 3.1. National consciousness and football myth

When football achieves national popularity, it can contribute significantly to the formation of these narratives of collective national identity. To what extent did the nation's interest become focused on French football as a purveyor of stories, images, symbols and rituals of national significance? A major event was the national team's first victory over England in 1921, on the anniversary of Napoléon's death. The growing number of international matches, and the hosting of the World Cup in 1938 helped create a shared sense of national identity in supporting the country, especially since the different



Federations had settled their differences in 1919 in the wake of the political Union Sacrée entered into for the purposes of national defence in 1914. The problem was that France was not notably successful in international encounters.

The symbiotic relationship of football and politics was recognised early when the annual French Cup Final was quickly invested with a significance as a national annual ritual, with the official presence of the President of the Republic to meet the teams and present the Cup. The other symbiotic relationship, between football and the press, allowed the press, before the Second World War, to create a star system to exploit interest in the game through narratives of the exploits of a number of national heroes and characters in French soccer. Although this began in earnest in the 1950s with the popularity of radio and the increasing number of magazines with photos (Wahl 1989: 287), there were earlier stars. One indisputable hero of the 1920s was perhaps the only famous goalkeeper in French history, Pierre Chayriguès, playing for Red Star with a personality to match his huge frame. He was reputed to claim enormous expenses payments and medical bills in the days before professionalism was legal and shamateurism was consequently growing. On at least one occasion he arrived at the FFFA headquarters on crutches, leaving with a large cheque in his pocket ... without his crutches. (Thibert & Rethacker 1991: 65). Despite his size, this picture of Chayriguès fits the common national stereotype of the wily little French individualist putting one over on those in authority, a recognisable character from Maupassant's short stories to the cartoon character Astérix.

Larger-than-life club chairmen have always loomed large in the folklore of French football. Georges Bayrou, Chairman of Mediterranean coast club FC Sète, used to stay in the dressing room for big matches, unable to watch his beloved green-and-whites. Losing Cup finalists in 1923, 1924 and 1929, when they reached the final in 1930, he decided he had to join the President of the Republic, Doumergue, in the *tribune d'honneur* of Stade Colombes, Paris. He sat through the goal-less first half with top hat firmly planted on his head, but at half-time could stand it no longer, and left for the dressing room, where he took off his hat and frock coat, mopped his brow, and opened the window to listen to the 35,000 spectators outside. He heard Racing Club de Paris take the lead, and then with a minute to go Sète equalised, and went on to win in extra-time. That evening in the Gare de Lyon, Paris, a ticket inspector was surprised to find in a second class compartment Chairman Bayrou sitting opposite the Cup placed lovingly on the seat opposite. He was even more surprised when Bayrou took out his wallet and bought a ticket for the sacred object he had been dreaming of bringing home to Sète for the past ten years. (Thibert & Rethacker 1991: 66-67).

### 3.2. European success and Sweden 1958: televised memories

Before the advent of live pictures, stories such as these form the shared folk memory of the game. The main successes of French club and national sides have coincided with the beginnings and later the high points of the era of national terrestrial television, before subscription or pay-TV prevented a fully national audience from seeing games at the same time. *L'Equipe*, along the same lines as its organisation of and coverage of the Tour de France cycle race, also made the most of the European Cup that it had originated to stimulate interest and thereby sell papers. It was in the 1950s, with the innovation of European club competitions and France's unexpectedly good performance in the World Cup, that national interest was aroused in football as a vector of national values. In the very first season of the European Cup, 1955-56, the French public was increasingly interested to follow the progress of Stade de Reims, playing all their home matches in Paris to allow bigger gates (Wahl 1989: 315). Reims dominated French football in the 1950s with six French championships in twelve years from 1949. With their star forward Raymond Kopa, they fell 4-3 at the final European hurdle in Paris to Real Madrid, who were to go on to win the trophy for five consecutive years. Reims reached the final again in 1959, but this time Kopa was gaining his third winner's medal playing alongside the now legendary Di Stefano of Real. As with Platini in Italy in the 1980s, and Ginola and Cantona in England in the 1990s, the exploits abroad of a French star were also a matter of keen interest and pride in France.

In the meantime, the national interest created around the top French club side was capitalised on by the national team (which included six of Kopa's former Reims team-mates). France finished third in the World Cup in Sweden in 1958, with Just Fontaine achieving 13 goals in six matches in the course of the finals, a record unlikely to be beaten in today's more defensive game. Radio coverage by Europe No.1 (Bourg 1986: 128) was the live link with the French public and the commentator underlined the national import of the event by greeting each of France's two goals in the semi-final with a chauvinistic 'Vive la France'. In the days before substitutes, with centre-half Jonquet a virtual passenger, France could not overcome the odds and an unknown seventeen-year-old Brazilian scoring a hat-trick.

It was the European epic of 'les Verts', Saint-Etienne, in the 1970s, that caught the national imagination and gave football unequalled popularity in France. Dominating French football for over a decade (champions in 1964, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1981; Cup winners in 1968, 1970, 1974, 1975, 1977), they found themselves in one of the European competitions in every season bar three from 1967 to 1983. The Saint-Etienne team had bravura,

and charismatic players (the Revelli brothers, Larqué the organiser, and Rocheteau), and their European matches had suspense, all the ingredients of good television, which showed their matches live. Developing more slowly than in Britain, French television could, by the end of the sixties, reach a full national audience (Bureau 1986: 97-98) and had improved the notoriously poor quality of coverage since the 1960s (Wahl 1989: 324-326). The Mexico World Cup of 1970 had been the first occasion for the mass transmission of matches on French television (Bourg 1986: 128). 1975 saw the Greens' progress halted at semi-final level by Beckenbauer's Bayern. But the match that stays in the memory of the sporting public is the quarter final against Dynamo Kiev in 1976. Having lost the first (away) leg 2-0, Saint-Etienne snatched victory in the return home leg 3-0 after extra time. Defeat in the final against Bayern Munich (again) at Hampden Park, Glasgow, by a single goal confirms, for Wahl (1989, p. 315) 'the national public's attachment to losing heroes courageously resisting inhuman adversaries'. For two years football had offered the national television audience public regular episodes of their top club's European saga.

### **3.3. France v. Germany 1982 ( . . . 1870, 1914, 1940, . . . )**

Wahl's analysis fits the next major trauma of the French national football consciousness: Seville 1982. 30 million French television viewers (65% of the national audience) sat entranced by the interminably unfolding drama. In progressing to the semi-finals of the World Cup with attacking panache that won them support from all around the world from lovers of the beautiful game, the French team under the inspired captaincy of Platini prepared to meet West Germany. For many viewers France versus Germany had a history (1870, 1914, 1940); the commentators didn't need to recall it.

Démerin (Bureau 1986: 120-125) recalls the tricolours' multi-coloured team representing France from Dunkirk to Tamanrasset, playing football as beautiful as a fireworks display, the technicolor of France versus the black-and-white of Germany. The most powerful images that remain in the mind are of the infamous turning point of the match: in the fiftieth minute, one goal each: the German goalkeeper Schumacher rushing out of his penalty area and crashing into Battiston, as he chases a through ball; the shocked concern of captain Platini as he puts out a hand towards his unconscious team-mate's shoulder lying motionless on the stretcher. No goal, and the Dutch referee awards no penalty, no sending off. Schumacher was quoted afterwards as more or less admitting to a 'professional foul': "Football has changed a lot in 15 year. Before,

perhaps, the clash with Battiston wouldn't have happened. But today you are always playing at the limit. Football is also a business; players are extremely tensed up." (Bourg 1986: 171-172)

The French continue to attack relentlessly, Rocheteau has a goal disallowed, Amoros hits the bar in the 90th minute, but the match goes into extra time with no more goals. Trésor, then Giresse put France 3-1 ahead in the first ten minutes of extra time. A tiring French team concede a goal before the turn round and then an equaliser in the 108th minute, but extra time finishes with the sides still level. In the penalty shoot-out, each side converts four out of the first five penalties. In the sudden death phase: Bossis misses, Hrubesch scores. Manager Hidalgo remains generous and dignified in defeat.

The intensity of the match, its long drawn out conclusions, remembers Olivier Margot (Bureau 1986: 97-98), plunged a nation of television viewers into a state of shock, drained by the injustice of it all. In the memory of one of the most famous TV sports journalist, Georges de Caune, the Battiston-Schumacher incident revived in men of his generation emotions felt during the Second World War (Lecoq 1997:132). A whole nation experienced together the catharsis of shared disappointment for their tragic national heroes. Manager and players immediately entered the Pantheon of valiant French sporting losers, like so many Racinian heroes unable to sustain the unequal struggle against the inevitable course of destiny. When a few days later Germany lost to Italy in the final, *France Football* headlined: 'Justice est faite' (Justice has been done').

Victory two years later in the European Nation's Cup at the Parc des Princes for Platini's heroes, the first French victory in a major international tournament, was constantly replayed on television. Fans celebrated deliriously in the streets of a Paris temporarily diverted from worry over unemployment and socialist economic policy. Hidalgo becomes a national hero. Platini is depicted as a national treasure, 'Platinix le goalois', top scorer with nine goals in the tournament, a legend in France and a legend in Italy, where he had already won the first of his two Championship medals with Juventus, two of his three top scorer trophies, two of his three European Footballer of the Year trophies, a European Cup Winners Cup medal, and he could not have imagined the manner in which he would win his European Champions cup medal at Heysel the following year. Losing in the semi-final to Germany in the next World Cup in Guadalajara in 1986, finally finishing third, seems in comparison with the previous events an anticlimax, but nicely fitting the Wahl thesis of inevitable and courageous defeats for 'les petits Français'.

### 3.4. Triumph and disaster: 'la France qui gagne' and Furiani

Most recently, club success for the first time in Europe has mobilised national support for Marseille, French league champions five years in succession, 1989-1993. After two European semi-finals (1988, and 1990), they were unjustly (in the eyes of lovers of attacking football) denied a European Cup win in 1991 by a very negative Red Star Belgrade who managed to nullify an attacking Marseille team including Waddle and Papin, before winning on penalties. The same old story of gallant losers for the French public. 1993 finally saw Marseille beat Milan AC in Munich with a single goal from Basile Boli, their star-studded team strengthened by imports Boksic and Voeller. Not to be outdone, and to confirm it is henceforward possible, Paris-Saint-Germain won the European Cup Winners Cup in 1996, and then finished runners up to Robson and Ronaldo's Barcelona the following year, making it five successive European semi-finals, equalled only by Real Madrid and Ajax Amsterdam.

A final event engraved on the national consciousness of football that somehow symbolised the decline of football's reputation was the Furiani disaster - France's Hillsborough, in the Furiani stadium in Corsica, where little Bastia had defied all comers in 1977-78 to reach the final of the UEFA Cup. Cramped between sea, railway line and hills, with barbed wire round the outside, giving the impression of a fortress, the ground was described in the 1980s as the oldest and most dilapidated stadium in Division 1. Here a passionate crowd, for whom the club came to signify Corsican nationalism taking on its French oppressors, a crowd kept only a metre from the pitch by old wire fencing, destroyed opposition spirit by their hostility and Bastia acquired a reputation of invincibility at home. (Urbini in Bureau 1986: 99-100) In 1992 temporary scaffolding erected to increase the ground's 8500 capacity for a Cup semi-final against Marseille collapsed before the game killing eleven spectators and injuring 700. Only a few years after Heysel, the French authorities, out of respect for the dead, had the sense of values to cancel the whole competition and not play the Final. In the season following Furiani, football seemed at low ebb, with blood on its hands, the shameful smell of bribery and corruption emerging from the Marseille-Valenciennes-Tapie affair, a pitiful elimination from the World Cup after shock results against Bulgaria and Israel, and internal conflict between clubs and Federation.

Because the club sides of Reims, Saint-Etienne and Marseille so dominated the French championship in their respective eras with no real home challenger, it was all the easier for the national public to identify with them as carrying national values in their European matches, as much as the national side itself. Following club and national teams in international competitions has woven a thread of shared experiences, whether mediated by press, radio or television, that Wahl has seen as constituting

narratives of collective national identity: pride and elation at French style, artistry and courage often dissolving into heroic disappointment and a feeling that the fates are more often than not against France. The detail of Wahl's analysis may no longer hold true since France's victory in the European Nation's Cup and European victories at club level by Marseille and Paris Saint Germain. 'Enfin, la France perd sa virginité!', comment Rocheteau and Chaumier looking forward to future conquests and seductions. (Rocheteau & Chaumier 1997: 953) Indeed current French football guides recognise that French success in football has been increasing: their international players are much in demand by richer foreign clubs, while those remaining in France managed to ensure that an unprecedented ten clubs qualified for the three major European club competitions in 1997-98. 'Une France qui gagne' is the up-beat title of a review of French participation in Europe over the last ten years, their classification of European achievement putting France third behind Italy and Germany (Rocheteau & Chaumier 1997: 950).

### **3.5. The National team and French style**

One of the myths commonly mediated through football relates to national styles of play. Beaud and Noiriel (1990: 93-94) see judgements on national style as a construction, a discourse that maintains chauvinism and xenophobia. In the early 20th century football became an instrument for the spread of patriotism whether through the *Miroir des sports* or via the radio or later via television. Nationalism commonly emerges from commentaries and from the rituals that surround the game (national anthems, flags, exchange of pennants, red-white-and-blue strips) The media and football writers have often used concepts of national style, describing France's style of play as more intelligent and adventurous and less physical or defensive than that of their northern neighbours. Nussle (in Bureau 1986: 24-25) for example describes French teams of the Platini era as playing 'champagne football' characterised by improvisation, vivacity, a sparkling passing game, but one that was vulnerable and fragile.

One of the best histories of French football (Thibert & Rethacker 1996: 57) picks out the lasting impact on French style of play of the visiting Uruguayans in the 1924 Olympic Games held in Paris. Until then influences had come mainly from across the Channel. The Uruguayans were the revelation of the tournament, bringing a new type of football to France. Beating France 5-1 in the quarter-finals in front of 45,000 home spectators (1st June 1924), they inspired admiration for their South American artistry, giving the French a football lesson, almost literally. Their style has been described as combining artistry, a sense of entertainment, virtuosity, and the effectiveness and realism of professionals. They were described as acrobats, ball jugglers; their

play was characterised by 'finesse, souplesse, vivacité, force, solidité'. Their influence in establishing a French style of play (or perhaps in establishing a conceptual framework through which to talk about football and style) was maintained by their continued international success: Olympic champions again in 1928 and first World Cup winners in 1930.

The Uruguayan dialectic emerges in descriptions of French national styles in the mouths of national team managers over the years, as the mood swings between power and solidity on the one hand and finesse, flexibility and vivacity on the other. Albert Batteux, coach of the successful Reims teams, and successful national manager in 1958, and Michel Hidalgo, manager of the Platini teams of the 1980s, promoted an open, attacking style giving full scope to individual brilliance of Kopa and Fontaine or Platini and Tigana. Georges Boulogne, national team manager in the 1970s was a partisan of 'football labeur' (football as hard work). Both approaches appear to have at their base the same conception of French national character as undisciplined and individualistic, the one seeing it positively, the other negatively. Boulogne's response was to exercise total authority over the players, the authoritarian approach of a coach cracking the whip over the galley-slaves (an image used by Wahl) to instil a sense of solidarity and team-work in players whom he sees as naturally individualistic because of competition for places in the team. (Wahl 1989: 297-299) Partisans of football as hard labour drove out Just Fontaine as national team coach (1966-67).

In the May '68 events Boulogne had been attacked by players occupying the FFF offices. As the Federation's Coaching Director in the late sixties, he had been developing ideas on what he called 'modern football'. In order for French football to adapt to modern economic conditions and to international competition he claimed football had to stop being an enjoyable game ('une activité ludique'). Henceforward it had to be rigorous, and disciplined. He used vocabulary based on economic thinking of the time: organisation, effort, productivity. His new direction meant giving up improvisation based on the individualism recommended by Batteux. After Gaullist political authority was re-established following May 68, Boulogne took over the national team in 1969 with the idea of instilling an ethic of discipline and effort, a more rigorous type of game based more on defence, therefore less entertaining, less spectacular. Players had to accept more discipline on the pitch. When France did not qualify for the 1970 and 1974 World Cups, Boulogne saw this as proof that France was not a sporting nation. He was rewarded by becoming National Technical Director of Coaching in 1972, and set up a national coaching

structure, through which he was even more able to impose his views. (Wahl 1989:318, & Wahl 1990b: 80-82).

Michel Hidalgo, former head of the players' Union, an ex-player, who took over as national team manager in 1976, was by contrast a firm partisan of Batteux's attacking style, and of 'le plaisir de jouer', rejecting military vocabulary, telling his players 'to go out and enjoy themselves. (Wahl 1989:321). Win at all costs is not the main object. Style becomes just as important as effectiveness, or rather style being the one of the key objectives, success is achieved by playing with style. The French public, and Italian public, seemed to agree. Agnelli, President of Juventus, having taken Platini to Italy, used the same concepts when discussing French style, declaring Platini brought glamour and adventure to the traditionally solid Teutonic [*sic*] style of Juventus. He might also have included the word 'entertainment', since he added that his greatest pleasure in life had been watching Platini play. (Leclair 1997: 74-75)

Wahl sees Boulogne's critics in 1968 as harping back nostalgically to a less restrictive past, rejecting notions of industrialism and performance, just as students and workers were rejecting the consumer society and industrial society. (Wahl 1990: 81-82) Equally the authoritarianism of Boulogne may be seen as reflecting the dominant Gaullist ideology of an earlier time, and while possibly in tune with the way industrial society was developing, was arguably becoming out of tune with a post-May '68 society.

De Gaulle reputedly worried about how to govern a country that produced 365 different cheeses and found part of the solution in a 'volontariste' state: the basis of the Gaullist presidential regime of the Fifth Republic is to give the state and its (democratically elected) leaders the authority to take decisions in the national interest which cut across the myriad of individual interests represented in parliament's multi-party system. Post-Gaullist France has been attempting little by little to dismantle some of the authoritarian institutional and mental structures of an earlier age. Hidalgo was more in tune with Mitterrand's France of the 1980s which culminated in both Mitterrand's presidential re-election campaign of 1988 and the Bicentenary celebrations of 1989 led by the fashion designer Jean-Paul Goude, both being the triumph of style over substance. As co-director of the World Cup Organising Committee, Platini's desire to turn France 1998 into 33 days of 'fête' is in direct line of descent from Batteux, Hidalgo and May '68, but of course hides the reality behind the events on the pitch: the biggest commercial sporting manifestation not only to come to France, but anywhere in the world.



#### 4. Conclusion

Hosting the 1998 World Cup Finals reflects France's long commitment to the world game, despite the fact that French success at European club and international levels has been somewhat muted. Over the years, nonetheless, Frenchmen have been at the heart of moves to give an international dimension to football. In the face of English opposition, the world governing body, FIFA, was created on the initiative of French and Dutch representatives in 1904, and the President of the French Football Federation, Jules Rimet, was elected as FIFA President in 1920. The concept of a World Cup competition was the brain-child of Henri Delaunay, secretary of the French Football Federation, and Rimet, whose name was borne by the original trophy. The idea of a European Club competition came from Gabriel Hanot, editor of the famous French daily sports paper *L'Equipe*. After English champions Wolverhampton Wanderers had beaten Moscow Spartak and Hungarian Champions Honved in 1954, the *Daily Mail* claimed that they were world club champions. The editor of *L'Equipe* was sceptical and proposed a more structured way of deciding Europe's top club. UEFA had only just come into existence and refused initially to take responsibility for organising a competition. So *L'Equipe* contacted the relevant clubs, rules were agreed, FIFA authorised it, before UEFA finally agreed to organise it from September 1955 onwards, with the final in Paris. (Thomas *et al.* 1991: 96-98) The idea for the European Nations Championship is owed to Henri Delaunay, who, unfortunately, did not live to see the first finals take place, again in France, in 1960. Both in its organisational structures and its international competitions, then, football as a world game owes much to France.

Conversely, it can be argued that France also owes much to football through the game's contribution to fashioning a sense of national identity in the twentieth century. Through accounts and images of heroic defeats in 1958 and 1982, folk tales of clever individuals like Charyguès getting the better of the establishment, or the way that national coaches have based their strategies on the essential individualism of their players from the fifties to the eighties, a recurrent national self-image has been purveyed through football: what a the political commentator has called, in another context, the Astérix complex (Duhamel 1985). More recently this expectation of inevitable defeat for 'les petits Français', while emerging with honour safe and some satisfactions from small victories achieved through wily individualism against overwhelming odds, has given way to a greater national self-confidence. Footballing successes in the late 1980s and the 1990s, especially the victory of Marseille in the European Cup, have confirmed a sense of France as a nation coming of age. A major soccer guide

expresses this as 'Enfin, la France perd sa virginité!' ('At last France has lost her virginity.') (Rocheteau & Chaumier 1997: 953) Footballing success is a confirmation that France can now play legitimately with the big boys. The Astérix complex has given way to an expectation of club and national team success on the international stage, just as France, as the world's fourth economic power, now expects to play the leading role in European politics. The organisation of the World Cup is one more expression of this new-found national self-confidence.

Football has acted as a vector for these national values via its mediatisation. Not only has the written press, especially the sports daily *L'Equipe*, promoted football, but broadcasting and football have promoted each other's growth and popularity symbiotically. In the future as in the past football and the mass media are inextricably linked. The popularisation of television in the very early days was significantly aided by the coverage of the French Cup Final from 1950 onwards, and then the Saint-Etienne European matches. Indeed the very creation of a television service in France is owed to an entrepreneur's passionate interest in football. In 1927, on one of his frequent cross-channel trips to see English League football matches Ernest Chamond, Head of the Compagnie des Compteurs, met John Logie Baird, the inventor of television. Seeing the commercial future of the invention as allowing millions of people to watch sports events from their armchair, he immediately set up a laboratory in Montrouge and four years later the first public television broadcasts took place in France. (Lecoq 1997: 133). Now, the biggest sponsor of football is commercial television, and the owner of the biggest club in France, PSG, is the highly profitable subscription television channel Canal Plus. Such are the stakes involved that the future of French digital television, which has come on stream in France before any other European country, is tied to the selling of pay-per-view subscriptions to French football. CanalSatellite offers all the French First Division football matches simultaneously live on 9 channels costing 50 francs (£5) for a given match or 75 francs for all of them on the given evening. (Dutheil 1996: 2-3; Bonnot *et al.* 1997: 9) In parallel to this commercialisation of the game are moves to persuade government to allow French clubs to be quoted on the stock exchange as ordinary limited companies (De Gasquet, *et al.* 1997: 58). The risks are high and football will either take off in France after 1998 or enter another phase of serious financial difficulty and possible decline.

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